# Exploring the evolving saga of artificial intelligence



The landscape of artificial intelligence (AI) continues to evolve, with significant developments occurring within Silicon Valley and beyond. A recently published book explores the nuances of this burgeoning sector, tracking the fortunes of various start-ups and established figures in the realm of AI. Much like a soap opera, the narrative features both celebrated innovators and controversial figures, hinting at an ongoing saga of ambition and rivalry.

In the opening remarks of the book, Gary Rivlin reflects on the disillusionment surrounding AI, citing its history of underwhelming advancements since the term was first introduced in the 1950s. AI's grand promise of achieving superhuman intelligence, akin to the elusive goal of nuclear fusion, has consistently been projected a decade or two away. Rivlin notes that initial attempts to teach computers through linear models yielded minimal results until the focus shifted to neural networks—akin to the interconnected neurons in the human brain—which marked a pivotal moment in AI development.

A key milestone came with the establishment of DeepMind, a British company instrumental in advancing deep learning. Innovatively, DeepMind's researchers designed AI systems to play games like chess, allowing the machines to learn by competing against themselves numerous times, resulting in achievements like AlphaZero, introduced in 2017. This technology surpassed traditional chess-playing software, demonstrating capabilities beyond human players.

Subsequent advancements occurred with Google, following its acquisition of DeepMind in 2014 for $650 million. A groundbreaking paper titled "Attention Is All You Need," published in 2017, introduced the transformer model, which has become the backbone of various AI applications, including ChatGPT and a wave of chatbots, image generation tools, and coding assistants.

The book scrutinises the journey of Inflection AI, a start-up led by Reid Hoffman, co-founder of LinkedIn, alongside Mustafa Suleyman, a DeepMind co-founder. Rivlin presents a narrative that often reads as a tribute to Hoffman, portrayed as "Silicon Valley’s philosopher-king." Suleyman’s aspirations for developing an AI endowed with emotional intelligence are explored, even as his technical contributions at DeepMind remain subjects of debate.

While Hoffman and Suleyman have garnered attention, Rivlin does not shy away from discussing setbacks. Inflection AI struggled in the marketplace and was ultimately absorbed in a 'reverse acqui-hire,' with its leaders transitioning to roles within Microsoft. Satya Nadella, CEO of Microsoft, has been acknowledged for successfully navigating the company's transformation into a leader in cloud computing and AI, facilitated through its partnership with OpenAI.

Amidst these developments, there exists rising competition. DeepSeek, a Chinese AI released in late 2024, claims to have achieved training costs significantly lower than those for ChatGPT-4. This announcement led to a dramatic drop in the value of Nvidia, a key supplier of GPU chips used in AI training.

The book also notes Elon Musk’s peripheral involvement. While he is depicted as a disruptive figure, his own AI initiatives, including the advancement of Grok 3 under X, are not extensively covered. Groundbreaking work continues elsewhere, notably by Yann LeCun with Meta’s Llama models.

With the rapid evolution of AI, the discourse surrounding its potential ramifications is markedly divided, oscillating between utopian predictions and apocalyptic warnings. Pioneer Geoffrey Hinton, who received last year’s Nobel Prize in physics for his pioneering neural network research, conveyed his concerns by resigning from Google, suggesting there is a significant risk that AI could pose existential threats to humanity. In a public commentary, rapper Snoop Dogg echoed a sense of incredulity regarding these developments.

Despite warnings, Rivlin identifies the significant advantages AI can offer in fields such as healthcare, where it could revolutionise cancer treatments and diagnostic tools. As Hoffman embarks on new ventures, including Manas AI, the exploration of how AI can enhance human existence is framed as a priority.

As the future of AI unfolds, the crucial question remains whether it will act as a benefactor or a threat to society, leaving the community in anticipation of what the next chapter in this ongoing saga will hold.

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